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AUTHOR: SMSgt K. J. Dwyer, 3 May 1994

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APPROVED BY: Gary R. Akin  
GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF  
Director  
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

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# THE EVOLUTION OF PAY AND BENEFITS FOR AIR FORCE ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Our Nation was born out of war, and the pay and benefits given to veterans were originally introduced to get soldiers in the army, and then keep them there.(9:45) How the current system of pay and benefits came into being for Air Force personnel and what keeps our veterans benefits alive will be addressed in this paper. First, a brief history of how these entitlements evolved through our Nation's history. Next, we'll look at some of the changes to the pay and benefit system we have now. Lastly, we'll look at some of the champions and groups who are ever vigilant to protecting our rights as veterans. First, let's examine the development of our benefits, including pay.

The first attempt to offer support for veterans and their families was after Plymouth Colony's war with the Pequot Indians. The cornerstone for the structure of U.S. veterans benefits was an English law, An Acte for the Reliefe of Soldiers, in 1592.(1:14) This was the basis for General Washington would use to persuade the early government leaders to provide pay for his soldiers to keep morale up and to reduce the desertion rate. Even in the very beginning of our country, military leaders pleaded with Congressional leaders for pay and benefits.

On 29 September 1789, the U.S. Congress enacted a pension law which also stated pensions would be paid to veterans by the Federal government. This marked the first federal veteran pension and set the precedence for the federal government to pick up the tab. The Act of 30 April 1790, included uniform clothing and pay for NCO's and the troops. It has been an enduring as well as an exclusive set of pay and allowances for enlisted personnel. Yet this pension was not nearly enough if the vet needed medical care. It was not until 1811, that the Nation's leadership created the first federally-funded facility for veterans. Congress mandated the U.S. Naval Home in Philadelphia be used as a permanent asylum for officers, sailors and Marines. While it would not be occupied for another 22 years, at least there was one place for veterans to go. (1:14)

Historically, men volunteered to support and defend our Nation in time of war. Yet, nothing was established on a continuing basis for soldiers and sailors for many years. States took care of indigent veterans from the Indian Wars and Mexican Border War by providing veterans homes. In 1867, Congress supplemented States' benefits with a National Home, but only for Union soldiers.

(8:16) It was not until 1958 that Confederate soldiers were pardoned and granted veteran benefits. However, America tried to return to peace and trade by expanding westward.

Enlisted personnel were the ones who most often used the benefits granted to veterans. They quite often lost homes or farms during conflicts and returned home to nothing. Yet they, continued to enlist and do their patriotic duty. Many of them elected to stay in or return to the Army or Navy because at least they could live, eat and earn a pension. However, veterans of the Spanish-American War were the last to receive a pension. This was due more to needing health care: typhus had become a serious problem. And, as in previous wars, the Nation's fighting force was demobilized.

Millions of men volunteered to fight in World War I (WWI), the "Great War." It was believed to be the "war to end all wars." (9:46) Despite their resounding success, veterans came home and found an indifferent Nation. While some federal and elected officials tried to help, it was not until the vets themselves marched on Washinton that their cries for help were heeded . Congress expanded the benefits package to include disability compensation, an insurance program and vocational rehabilitation for the war-disabled. Administered on 6 October 1917, the War Risk Insurance Act compensated veterans for injuries received in military service.

The Joint Service Pay Readjustment Act of 1922 was the first pay legislation that dealt with compensation for all services. Here, enlisted members were paid by rank. Cash equivalents were given in lieu of quarters, as well as subsistence pay when not provided by the government. Longevity pay also became a permanent addition to payfor enlisted troops. (5:51)

During this period, the Veterans Bureau was established. (4:--)It consolidated the efforts of three separate federal agencies: the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions within the Interior Department and the National Home for disabled Volunteer Soldiers. This led to the creation of the Veterans Administration in 1930. These early bureaus became our one federal office for help through another world war and numerous other conflicts.

As America started to rearm for World War II (WWII), Congressional leaders vowed not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors toward WWI vets. Congress approved the GI Bill of Rights in June, 1944. History shows the GI Bill allowed the Nation to avoid major economic disruption during the post war years. (1:2) However, it is almost ironic that President Roosevelt, who signed the orders eliminatimg veterans benefits in 1933, would be the same president to sign one of the most sweeping reform measures for veterans benefits in American history. (2:3)

Congress also passed some smaller laws for pay which directly affected enlisted personnel. The Pay Readjustment Act of 1942, recomputed longevity pay for the enlisted grades of E-1 to E-7. The enlisted troops started receiving the same rate as the officers did- -five percent of base pay for every three years of service. (5:15) Military compensation was revamped again after the Air Force and the Department of Defense were formed in 1947. In 1949, the Career Compensation Act enacted the current system of rental allowances. It also extended a housing allowance for enlisted personnel in grades E-5 to E-7. (5:15) It must be remembered that prior to WWI, enlisted personnel were not married and therefore did not need family housing. In 1950, the Dependents Assistance Act provided enlisted troops and their dependents similar housing as if they were civilians. This led to even more laws benefiting enlisted personnel as well as veterans.

Korean War vets made themselves heard and in 1952, the Veteran's Readjustment Act for Korean Conflict Veterans was enacted. Originally, Congressional leaders did not want to pass on any benefits to Korean War vets because America was not officially at war with Korea. But this Act of 1952 did extend to veterans of that undeclared war all the benefits previously given to WWII vets. (5:--)

Nineteen hundred and fifty-eight saw some more changes for enlisted people. The Uniformed Services Pay Act added the pay grades of E-8 and E-9. It also changed longevity pay from over four for an E-1 to only needing over two years. The Act of 16 December 1967 began some major changes for all the service's enlisted people. It started the first Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, a review of all pay and benefits, for active duty as well as retired personnel. It also started the pay mechanism of linking military pay to pay raises for federal civilian workers. It ensured military personnel pay kept up with inflation, and continued pay adjustments without continual debate in Congress. (5:--)

Vietnam era vets not only faced a hostile Nation when they returned home, but were not accorded any of the benefits granted to veterans of prior years. In 1973, the GI Bill of Rights was extended to veterans of the conflict in Southeast Asia. Yet, the benefits, especially for education, hardly offset the current costs. This reflected some changes for veterans that weren't anticipated. Desert Shield/Desert Storm veterans also received bonuses, mainly due to the high number of Reservists and Air National Guard personnel participating in the Gulf War. This war saw the highest approval rate for the sacrifices armed forces veterans made for their country. And changes in our country's attitudes made for some necessary though belated changes to the military veteran.

From the very beginnings of our country, the Founding Fathers expected men would volunteer to serve their country. They came to be called the "citizen soldier." (8:12) Despite all the

flag-waving and patriotism, even General George Washington had to beseech the Continental Congress to get the minimums for his troops. This was necessary to stem the rising tide of desertion. Changes to American society and economy, as our country grew, prospered and dealt with aggression would require the citizen soldier.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, military service was considered the most important obligation of citizenship. Yet the idea of keeping a huge army and navy was anathema to our young nation. We had won our freedom from England, which also had to pay for a huge army and navy. This was the cause for the Colonist's revolt to start with. British rule taught the Americans about armies. However, the call to arms would continue to come and American men would respond, as they did in the Civil War. The 1800's would bring more changes as well as wars.

Regardless of the conflict, Americans always wanted to return to their homes and farms. Costs were relatively cheap and life was simple. The Civil War left many thousands dead and tens of thousands homeless. However, it became increasingly expensive as the Industrial Revolution took hold in America. The costs of mobilizing for war and then demobilizing after war were offset little by the growth of our Nation and the expanding economy. Additionally, states bore the biggest brunt of health care for veterans. Many arguments were raised throughout our history of keeping a huge standing army. The navy continued to exist due to shipping of trade goods around the world: guarding those trade ships as well as patrolling our borders. Pay and benefits continued to be something of an afterthought. America's foreign policy would play an important factor affecting change on our pay and benefits.

Foreign policy, more than economics, fueled the debate for huge armies. Americans didn't want any tangling alliances. *With all the riches our great continent had to offer, there was definitely no reason to involve ourselves in Europe's problems.* Isolationism took hold and pioneers pushed westward. Arguments continued for the use of a small standing militia, and conscription. (3:386) The small militia would be used only to protect citizens on our expansion to the Pacific Ocean. Isolationism became the official foreign policy of the U.S., despite some forays into minor conflicts with our neighbors. The country decided to rely on the "citizen soldier."

World War I caught America by surprise, and it took months to mobilize an army. The Congress and War Department established a draft to call all able-bodied men into service. This was the Great War, the war to end all wars. Afterwards, America returned again to isolationism. During this time frame despite economic calamity worldwide, one significant change occurred. The Veterans Administration was created, and it became the single federal agency veterans relied on. WWI saw many horrible ways human beings could inflict suffering on other humans. This

required health services nationwide and the Veterans Administration filled this void ably. (4:--)

From its humble and meager beginnings, the Veterans Administration now oversees a \$27 billion budget. Since the inception of the GI Bill, 18.3 million veterans have participated in education or vocational training programs. Many millions of veterans and their dependents are covered under one of eight insurance programs. Our country's leaders felt this would be enough to draw citizens to the armed forces and the draft was put aside. From 1919 to 1940, our nation relied on an all volunteer force. (3:368)

The All Volunteer Force (AVF) became the biggest change for pay and benefits in America's armed forces in 1973. Despite some limitations found in America during earlier periods of history with economics and foreign policy, the AVF appeared to be the answer. While it had critics, the AVF would use all the benefits currently afforded military personnel to recruit and retain qualified people. The AVF replaced the idea of the citizen soldier which had caused shortages in the past. The creation of the Air Force seemed to lend itself to the AVF. The aircraft industry took off after WWII, due to increases in technology. This enabled the Air Force to leap into the future. (7:76) According to David Segal, an early proponent of the AVF, the Air Force stood to gain the most from the change in recruiting. In his book, Recruiting For Uncle Sam, David Segal states the Air Force benefited from technology transfer that took place between private industry and the military. This helped the Air Force tremendously in its recruitment because people wanted to gain knowledge and experience working on this vessel of the skies. (7:77) This is also echoed by recruiters such as SMSgt. Lepant, Superintendent for the Northeast U.S. He cites education as the biggest drawing card for the armed forces in general, and the Air Force specifically. Many young people today don't get a college education and turn to the military for training. Asked if there was anything else drawing young people into the Air Force, he said no, "mainly education." (6:--)

So, education benefits clearly provide the drawing card for new recruits under the All Volunteer Force.

Despite all the benefits Congress bestows on the armed services, it takes more to preserve what we have. It takes a combined effort of some individuals as well as a few groups to maintain the level and quality of recruits under the All Volunteer Force. George Washington did his best to get pay and uniforms for enlisted people during the Revolutionary War. Though there were more statesmen of the time who fought for additional benefits, our first President was the most arduous supporter.

In later years, military officers who went on to elected positions also fought for increased benefits for enlisted personnel. Senators John Glenn and John McCain continually carry the fight for the enlisted folks. Senator Alan Cranston and Representative Beverly Byron joined the fight on Capitol Hill on our behalf. Senator Sam Nunn, the powerful chairman of the Senate Armed

Services Committee is another strong supporter of enlisted people. There are many other individuals who went to bat for enlisted people, to prevent the loss of any benefits veterans sacrifice their lives for. However, organized groups probably made the biggest impact.

The first organized group to focus Congressional attention on veterans needs was the Grand Army of The Republic (GAR). This post-Civil-war group mobilized veterans to bring pressure on the 1888 Congressional and Presidential elections. (3:78) Never before had any group banded together so well to make their voices heard in Washington.

A decade later, a a coalition of overseas veterans formed the Veterans of Foreign Wars to help preserve what few benefits allotted to vets. Coupled with efforts of the GAR, they fought for disability payments. As a result, a new Civil War pension law extended benefits to vets who had served at least 90 days. It was a triumph these groups could be proud of. (9:78) But these groups weren't alone in their fight.

The American Legion began in 1919 and began a career of carrying the fight for veterans benefits even to the streets. This group led a march on Washington, D.C. to protest the unfair treatment of World War I vets. Since that time they have been at the forefront of every major issue concerning benefits and pay for members of the armed forces, as well as retirees and dependents. The American Legion fought for many of the benefits provided by the Veterans Affairs (VA). These include: the guaranteed-home loan program, increasing the amount of health care the VA provides, educational assistance, and compensation for disabled veterans. American Legion vets also witnessed President Roosevelt's signing of the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944. The group is most proud of the milestone they reached when in 1988, the VA was elevated to cabinet level. President Reagan, himself a vet, happily signed the law. (1:--) Other groups also played a major part in preserving benefits for veterans.

AM VETS started in 1944 by nine small World War II veterans. Later, it expanded to include Korean War vets as well as Vietnam War vets. This group fought for many of the forgotten military people. It especially drove its point home concerning disabled vets of the Korean War. It must be remembered Congress didn't want to grant entitlements to these vets because America was not at war officially with Korea. However, this group persisted and all the benefits of the G.I. Bill of Rights were extended to these deserving vets. The same story was true for veterans of the conflict in Southeast Asia. On top of being resented for an unpopular war, Vietnam vets faced uphill battles for medical treatment not formally recognized by the VA. This group as well as the previous ones mentioned fought hard struggles to get and keep the benefits so richly deserved for veterans. (2:--)

Closer to home in the Air Force, there are two groups currently lobbying Congressional leaders for increased pay and benefits for all Air Force (AF) members. One is the Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA). The other is the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA). Both of these groups have waged a continuous assault on Washington to keep up the level of pay comparable to civilian counterparts. The Associations fought hard to maintain education benefits for AF members, and found a supporter in Representative "Sonny" Montgomery, leading to the Montgomery Bill. Both groups have lobbied Congress to preserve medical benefits as well as the commissary. They continually argue these benefits, especially for the younger troops. And during this time of the All Volunteer Force, they stress the fact that eroding benefits will seriously impair the retention of quality people in the Air Force. They rallied support when Secretary of the Air Force Verne Orr, and Chief of Staff General Gabriel went before the 98th Congress concerning compensation and entitlements for Air Force personnel. (3:179) The NCOA provided arguments for increased enlisted bonuses. (3:159) Despite their names, both groups work diligently on behalf of all enlisted personnel in the Air Force.

More recently, AFSA conducted campaigns to stem the rising tide of anti-military sentiment at the end of the Cold War. AFSA employs four full time, registered lobbyists to make our concerns known to elected leaders. This is kept up by their monthly magazine as well as monthly flyers from the chapters all over the world. Current legislation pending in Congress is highlighted, along with AFSA's efforts to preserve our benefits. They also add the names of key Congressional members, and addresses, requiring constituent support for bills pending in committee. Some of their recent victories include the 1992 pay raise and increased benefits for Desert Storm veterans. According to Chief Torrence, a past Chapter president, AFSA maintains a constant vigil for all AF members, including retirees. He speaks often of the services provided to AFSA members, as well as the camaraderie. After almost 30 years in the Air Force, the Chief believes AFSA will be one of the leaders preserving pay and benefits for enlisted Air Force members. However, he also adds that participating in the legislative process and voting in state and national elections will go a long way to helping. He says he will continue to recruit for AFSA even in retirement because it is an easy way to increase the benefits and compensation we have now and not lose them. (\*\*;--)

From our first president and Commander-in-Chief, George Washington, to a chief retiring after 30 meritorious years has been a long fight for pay and benefits for the armed services. This time frame spans the history of our nation. Throughout this history, various entitlements and benefits have been granted for the men and women who fought enemies of the United States; some paying the ultimate sacrifice of their life. From a law enacted in England in 1592 to compensate the first colonists in America, enlisted people reap the rewards of those who went before them.



Originally, meager pay and uniforms were issued to volunteers to fight the tyranny of a monarchy in England. Though meant to halt the increasing desertion rate, they came to signify the benefits afforded those who fought for our country. Congress extended benefits to veterans, only to withdraw them when it suited them. After each war, various pay and entitlements came into being. Sometimes it took several years afterward to receive these entitlements. At different times, compensation came in the form of a pension. At other times, pay and allowances became the motivating force for military people. Then medical benefits and education assistance persuaded enlisted folks. Whatever the cause, citizens would answer their nation's call to arms with a promise for some compensation for their service.

Changes in our country's economy prompted many to join the military. Many elected to stay in, even though benefits weren't all that much. After a war, many vets found themselves homeless or disabled. It was expected that entitlements from a grateful nation would see these vets through. Expansion of our nation westward led many Americans to hope for a better tomorrow. And after wars and battles, Congress mandated some laws to enable vets to be assimilated back into society. However, the foreign policy of our country has always led to isolationism, and this led to many fights with Congress to get some well-deserved benefits. This has been true from World War I up to Desert Storm. Continuously, armed forces were demobilized and no further thought might be given to the military. Something had to change-- and the All Volunteer Force came into being. This would eliminate the problems with having a draft, and hopefully cut down how much the government spent on defense.

Congress mandated the All Volunteer Force and the Air Force took advantage of new and exciting technology surrounding aircraft. Pay and benefits came as specialties grew in the Air Force. Training on all types of equipment enabled the Air Force to recruit and retain the best society had to offer. Additional benefits were added as the Congress realized what it took to get the best and brightest in the military. During this period, Congress pegged military pay raises to federal civilian wage increases, enabling enlisted personnel to keep up with costs in society. Preserving these entitlements, however, took the efforts of a few individuals and groups.

General George Washington was the first to lobby Congress for pay and allowances for the troops. On through history, other military leaders would argue vigorously for increased pay and benefits for the military. Many of our elected officials supported education programs, pay raises and disability payments for enlisted people. This practice by Congressmen and Senators became more popular as these elected leaders realized the military voted. However, veterans enjoyed more success making their voices heard if they banded together in an organization.

Several groups formed out of the need to raise the issue of pay, or protest the lack of commitment by the federal government to take care of the veterans. One group dates back to 1888, while another started in 1899. Other groups started after the two World Wars, mostly to present a unified front for their demands. Two later associations evolved from the needs required by the fairly new Air Force. Both lobby Congress aggressively for their members. And Congress listens. Numerous increases to pay, entitlements for education and medical care are the direct result. Slowly, with a growing membership, these groups make themselves heard and take the concerns of the enlisted voice to our elected leaders. While we can vote to tell Senators, Representatives and Presidents what we want, joining a group increases the chances of success.

By knowing what it took to get the benefits we have now, it is imperative we participate as citizens and members of an organization, to preserve our rights of pay and benefits for the sacrifices we may be called on for.

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